

REVELATION

VISIONS OF VICTORY

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From Prison to Paradise

(Revelation Introduction)

The late British prime minister Winston Churchill once described the former Soviet Union as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Many Christians view the book of Revelation in much the same way.¹

4 FEATURES to keep in mind as we study this book:

1. The Author

“**revelation**”—apokalupsis: disclosure, unveiling (*The book of Revelation is the disclosure from Jesus, about Jesus, belonging to Jesus Christ.*)

Written by John, the beloved disciple of Jesus (who also penned 1-3 John and the Gospel of John), around A.D. 90-96.

According to Irenaus, Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius: John was sent to the Isle of Patmos after an effective ministry in Ephesus during the 14th year of the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). He spent 18 months in exile (he wrote Revelation from a cave). Domitian died by assassination, and he was able to return to Ephesus (under the reign of Nerva – 96-98 AD). He died when he was 102-104 yrs old.

2. The Audience

These seven churches are real churches that existed in modern-day Turkey, and they were the original audience. However, they also can be descriptive of the condition of any church that has ever existed. The conditions of each church have also been evident in different seasons in church history:

- **Ephesus** (2:1-7) The apostolic Church (30-100 AD)
- **Smyrna** (2:8-11) The persecuted Church (100-300 AD)
- **Pergamum** (2:12-17) The church that married the world (300-500 AD)
- **Thyatira** (2:18-29) The worldly corrupt Church of Middle Ages (500-1600 AD)
- **Sardis** (3:1-6) The Church of the Reformation (1600-1800 AD)

¹ John MacArthur, *Because the Time Is Near: John MacArthur Explains the Book of Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 7.

- **Philadelphia** (3:7-13) The faithful, Christ-honoring, zealous, missionary-minded church that is in love with Jesus Christ, bringing glory to God. (1800-1900 AD)
- **Laodicea** (3:14-22) The lukewarm Church (1900- today)

3. The Approach

4 common approaches to reading Revelation²:

- 1) **PAST** (Preterist) – The word “preterist” is taken from a Latin word, “praeter,” meaning “past.” A Preterist believes that Revelation does not refer to future events, but to events that were fulfilled beginning in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and his Roman army.
- 2) **PANORAMA** (Historicist) – View the book of Revelation as an overview of church history, describing various times of persecution and tribulation.
- 3) **PARABOLIC** (Idealist) – Interpret Revelation symbolically, as a nonliteral depiction of the battle between God and the satanic forces of evil.
- 4) **PROPHECY** (Futurist) – Understand Revelation 4–22 as a prophetic account of actual future events, specifically focused on the end of this age. This view is the natural result of a straightforward reading of the book. Though there are symbols, they are talking about literal events.

*My interpretive approach will understand Revelation as **prophecy**. This is how I will walk through this series.*

4. The Application

Our knowledge of the Book of Revelation should cause us to...

- 1) **Worship the God Who knows the end from the beginning.** He is beyond time. His ultimate purposes will prevail.
- 2) **Live confidently today.** Though difficulties arise in our lives, the God Who holds the ultimate future, also holds our future. As we trust Him, we can know that He will fulfill His purposes in our personal lives as well.
- 3) **Claim the blessing** from reading this book. Revelation 1:3a says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it.”
- 4) **Anticipate the unfolding of future events.** Though we know how it will all end, we do not know the particulars. This should be exciting for the child of God.
- 5) **Point others to Jesus because time is short.** We don’t know when we will be taken to heaven, either in the Rapture or through death. With the time that remains for us, we should feel a sense of staying busy serving the Lord and pointing others to Him.

² The titles are from Bill Bennett, the common titles are in parenthesis. Descriptions are from John MacArthur, 13.